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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/22/2015
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: ANTI-SENATE MDC FACTION WINS PARLIAMENTARY
BY-ELECTION

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz under Section 1
.4 b/d

Summary

¶1. (C) The anti-Senate MDC faction candidate, Emmanuel Chisvuure, successfully defended the Budiriro constituency in a by-election held on May 20. The seat was vacant as a result of the February death of MDC M.P. Gilbert Shoko. In a tally confirmed by an independent election observing body, Chisvuure won 64 percent of the vote and the ruling ZANU-PF party candidate garnered 32 percent. The pro-Senate MDC candidate managed only 4 percent of the vote, a major setback for the fledgling party in its first foray into national electoral politics. The Harare high-density suburb was generally peaceful during the campaign and on election day, marred only by sporadic acts of violence and by the brief detention of the pro-Senate MDC leader Arthur Mutambara and his candidate. End summary.

Tsvangirai's MDC Holds Seat

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¶2. (SBU) Results released by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and confirmed by parallel vote counts conducted by the independent Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and the anti-Senate MDC show that anti-Senate MDC candidate Chisvuure received 7,949 votes, almost twice that of the other two competitors. Chisvuure was the campaign manager for Shoko when the latter won the seat in the March 2005 parliamentary elections. Significantly,

Shoko, who had remained loyal to MDC President Tsvangirai during the recent party split, had garnered 17,053 votes last March.

13. (SBU) The largely unknown ZANU-PF candidate, Jeremiah Bvirindi, got 3,961 votes as compared to 4,886 for the ZANU-PF candidate last March. The pro-Senate MDC candidate, Gabriel Chaibva, who lives outside of Budiriro, was the day's big loser, winning only 504 votes. Voter turnout was 26 percent, well below last March, but according to ZESN officials, typical for a by-election. The anti-Senate faction of the MDC and ZESN both had observers at all 24 polling stations and at the constituency counting center to monitor the final tabulation.

14. (SBU) Full statistics are not yet available, but ZESN estimates that approximately 2,500 would-be voters were turned away at the polling stations. The chief reason for these turn-aways appears to be a change in the electoral law last year that forbids the use of driver's licenses as proof of identification. ZESN officials noted that most voters appeared to be unaware of this change and said that it would alert ZEC to the need to conduct better voter education in the future.

Generally Calm Election

15. (SBU) Observers from ZESN and western Embassies in Harare) including one accredited observer from post) reported relative calm on election day, with voters progressing smoothly through polls and electoral agents generally acting professionally. In a briefing to the diplomatic community on May 22, ZESN Chairperson Reginald Matchaba-Hove reported only one violent incident on election day, when MDC supporters

allegedly assaulted four ZANU-PF supporters near a polling station. Police also arrested an apparent ZANU-PF supporter who was caught with a bag of fraudulent ballots.

16. (SBU) The campaign period was also generally peaceful, but Matchaba-Hove noted that supporters of the anti-Senate MDC candidate had engaged in some "petty thuggery," including vandalism of four homes belonging to ZANU-PF supporters and the assault of ZANU-PF supporters who attended anti-Senate MDC rallies. A Japanese diplomat who attended Tsvangirai's rally in Budiriro on May 14 was also surrounded, shoved, and threatened by anti-Senate youths who reportedly believed the diplomat was Chinese.

17. (SBU) The three candidates were generally allowed to conduct rallies. However, in an incident that attracted widespread media attention but had no impact on the election results, police arrested pro-Senate leader Mutambara along with Chaibva and dozens of other party members on May 19 for allegedly campaigning without permission. The pro-Senate organizers were released later that day, but have been ordered to return to court on May 22.

Comment

18. (C) The anti-senate MDC probably had the most at stake in the by-election. A loss to ZANU-PF in what it considered a safe seat would have been a sharp setback. Although it dodged that bullet and for the first time successfully conducted a parallel vote count, Tsvangirai and his supporters have to be disappointed with the relatively low voter turnout, which clearly points to voter apathy as a major obstacle to their efforts to press for political and economic change.

19. (C) That said, ZANU-PF also has to be disappointed with the results. The ZANU-PF candidate's defeat came despite Mugabe's personal appearance in the district two days before the election. Moreover, a ZANU-PF victory in an MDC

stronghold would have justified the party,s campaign bravado that the MDC was "doomed." However, the most disappointed party has to be the pro-Senate faction of the MDC, which took a significant hit to its legitimacy. Its meager showing will further marginalize the faction, which has largely failed to attract popular support and which has begun to bleed supporters in recent months. The faction has yet to be heard from publicly following the election and will have a difficult time spinning the results as anything other than a disaster.

¶10. (C) Arguably the best showing in the by-election was put in by ZESN, which dramatically improved its performance from last March and emerged from the by-election both stronger and more independent. ZESN also successfully conducted a parallel vote count for the first time. Moreover, its public and private statements were timely and firm, including forthright condemnation of opposition-led violence.
SCHULTZ